

VZCZCXYZ0149  
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHKKH #0320/01 0641210  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
O 041210Z MAR 08  
FM AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0108  
INFO RUCNFUR/DARFUR COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE  
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L KHARTOUM 000320

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR D, AF A/S FRAZER, AF/SPG, SE WILLIAMSON, NSC  
FOR BPITTMAN AND CHUDSON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/03/2018  
TAGS: [EAID](#) [KPKO](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [UN](#) [AU](#) [SU](#)  
SUBJECT: OCHA TO SE WILLIAMSON: "CIVILIANS PAID PRICE FOR  
SUDANESE COUNTERSTRIKE"

REF: A. KHARTOUM 274  
[1](#)B. KHARTOUM 269  
[1](#)C. KHARTOUM 266

Classified By: CDA Alberto M. Fernandez, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) On February 29, UN OCHA (Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) Sudan Office Director Mike McDonagh (protect) provided SE Williamson with a graphic but balanced account of the violence that occurred in West Darfur in February 2008. In a discussion informed by his recent two first hand visits to the region, McDonagh candidly admitted to the complex nature of events easily manipulated by critics of, and apologists for the regime in Khartoum with both rebel movements and the Sudanese Government responsible.

-----  
A CYCLE OF VIOLENCE  
-----

[1](#)2. (C) The OCHA Director began by describing the genesis of the campaign. This begins in late December when the rebel Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) rebel movement, a largely Zaghawa and often Islamist, Darfuri rebel movement seized, with Chadian military (including airstrikes inside Sudan) help, the lightly held NW Darfur towns of Silea, Serba, and Abu Siraj. Neither the Chadian airstrikes (three attacks, according to the Sudanese) nor the seizure of the towns generated much international attention. The rebels set up local administration and settled in for the long-haul. Locally police (there was no Sudanese military in the area) were expelled. Young men (who belong to different tribes than the JEM - most of them being Africa Massalit and Erenga) were pressured to join the rebels, women were mistreated including some rapes, according to McDonagh. He described most of the Darfur rebel groups as "mostly rebels without a cause," many of whom have degenerated into bandits. A longtime veteran of Darfur's (and Sudan's) many crises McDonagh noted that he never hears of a rebel commander dying in battle and that he has seen a steady deterioration in rebel motivation, "at the beginning, they did care about defending people" but that is no longer the case with material greed and political power being the driving force.

[1](#)3. (C) The JEM provocation led to a carefully prepared and massive Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) operation "intended to teach the civilian population a lesson" about allowing rebels in their midst. The SAF began by sending in their shock troops of janjawid irregular cavalry and machine gun-mounted "technicals", MI-24 helicopter gunships and regular army units. The JEM fled the towns abandoning the civilian population to their fate and the GOS, especially the

janjawid, exacted a heavy price. Looting, of both the meager local possessions and of international NGOs, was systemic. Tens of thousands of local inhabitants fled east to Jebel Moon and west to the Chadian border (McDonagh described the situation on the Chadian side of the border as not much better than in West Darfur). Dozens of civilians were killed.

¶4. (C) McDonagh described specific outrages such as the deliberate double murder of the "Furshan" (tribal chief) and schoolmaster in Serba by janjawid, who before killing them execution-style, checked with higher authority on their Thuraya phones. In Silea, at least two pregnant women were killed. Also in Silea, a local ICRC employee was killed while his 8 colleagues huddled in the panic room next door, actually hearing the murder as it occurred. Numerous rapes had occurred as well. The population of Silea, for example, had declined from 12,000 to 600 (550 of them women). It seems that the dire situation had improved slightly by late February as regular SAF units settled down and sent their janjawid allies on their way. The UN had requested on February 24 the SAF Commander of the Western Region to send in local police to provide added security but this had not happened as of the 29th.

-----  
WHO WILL DELIVER SECURITY?  
-----

¶5. (C) McDonagh emphasized that as grim as the situation sounds, it is actually not hopeless. "Most people can, and will return, if there is security, and they don't care who provides it." UNAMID troops would be welcomed but so would be Sudanese police and even the regular army as long as order is provided. He noted that the situation began to improve slightly when the SAF Brigadier in charge of the military

operation is present. Even a tiny UNAMID presence can make a difference, he noted, "if they can't send a hundred, they should send a dozen." NGO workers come in every day and they provide for a steadying presence but they are absent as night when some of the worst abuses have occurred. McDonagh remarked that about 75,000 new IDPs had been created since UNAMID took over on January 1, more than a thousand a day, with the majority coming from this operation. He noted that even a token international presence - armed or unarmed - always has a salutary effect and tends to reduce violence and abuse, by the government or the rebels.

¶6. (C) As critical as he is of Sudanese Government depredations, McDonagh says that the West should recognize that Sudan allows a rather large humanitarian presence - 900 international aid workers plus 13,000 local staff - since 2004 and this has more or less remained steady. This is more than some other countries like Eritrea or Ethiopia (waging its own bloody counter-insurgency in Ogaden) allow. There is also no doubt, he continued, that the rebels are a major problem. The Sudanese regime is ready to sit down for peace talks but the rebels are fragmented and think that time is on their side. The mediation efforts of the UN and AU special envoys (Jan Eliasson and Salim Salim) seem like "a part-time job."

-----  
REBELS WITHOUT A CAUSE  
-----

¶7. (C) McDonagh provided a jaundiced but accurate description of the main rebel movements. He noted that Abdul Wahid Nur has about 2,000, mostly Fur, fighters out of a population of about 2 million Fur in the region (most of them being refugees and IDPs now). Abdul Wahid's fighters are mostly defensive, trying to hold onto whatever craggy havens they still possess, especially in Eastern Jebel Marra. Although they squabble among themselves, the Fur are "like the Palestinians, they see their suffering as their real strength" and aren't a credible military threat. Any real deal will have to bring the Fur on board and there is no substitute for Abdul Wahid "who needs to be cajoled rather

than threatened" otherwise he will become more of a cause celebre.

¶8. (C) He noted that the rest of the movements, who do most of the fighting, come from the tiny but warlike Zaghawa, especially the truculent JEM. McDonagh said that he would be surprised if JEM had more than 200 fighters left, augmented at times by Chadian military support and Chadian Zaghawa. The reason that they had taken this area in NW Darfur was that it was not far from the border and their logistical lines back into Chad. JEM was less of a military threat than a political one, with a sophisticated propaganda machine in the Darfur Diaspora and a well-educated political leadership including Dr. Khalil Ibrahim who aspires to regime change in Sudan and seizing the Presidential Palace for himself.

¶9. (C) Comment: As reftels pointed out, this latest round of violence was cynically prompted by JEM, triggering a callous and brutal Sudanese over-reaction, with innocent civilians bearing the brunt of the suffering and a formerly peaceful part of Darfur reduced to ashes. McDonagh accurately lays out the cynicism of all sides, the vacuum which the international community can fill, and the difficulty of finding a definitive end to a now low-grade but still quite nasty crisis that just entered its fifth year. A practical man, he focuses on steps on the ground - if not UNAMID, then Sudanese police, if not police then the regular army - which can give long-suffering people some breathing space. Even a marginal improvement in security could allow for improved humanitarian assistance and the possibility of some desperately needed development at the proper time. End comment.

¶10. (U) SE Williamson did not have a chance to review this cable before his departure.

FERNANDEZ